



USAID
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IRAQ

PRIMARY HEALTH CARE PROJECT

TECHNICAL BRIEF Community Involvement for Improved Maternal and Child Health



Photo: USAID / PHCPI

DEFINITION OF NGOS

According to the NGO Global Network, a non-governmental organization (NGO) is any non-profit, voluntary citizens' group which is organized on a local, national or international level. Task-oriented and driven by people with a common interest, NGOs perform a variety of service and humanitarian functions, bring citizen concerns to Governments, advocate and monitor policies and encourage political participation through provision of information. Some are organized around specific issues, such as human rights, environment or health. They provide analysis and expertise, serve as early warning mechanisms and help monitor and implement international agreements. Their relationship with offices and agencies of the United Nations system differs depending on their goals, their venue and the mandate of a particular institution.

Background

USAID's Primary Health Care Project in Iraq (PHCPI) seeks to improve primary health care (PHC) for all Iraqis with a focus on helping the Ministry of Health (MoH) achieve Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 4 & 5, improving maternal health and decreasing child mortality. A key aspect to improved health is community participation. Involving the community in prioritizing health issues and finding sustainable solutions will improve the quality of care provided by primary health care centers (PHCCs).

Over the past three years, PHCPI has focused on the importance of community participation and has actively included community members from both the PHCCs and within the community and has established 360 Local Health Committees (LHCs) throughout Iraq.

Raised Awareness through LHCs

All LHCs were trained on the Community Partnership Handbook, LHCs Operational Guideline, as well as the Capacity Building and Health Volunteers Curriculum. After this, the community's role increased and LHCs played a vital role in supporting PHCCs and delivering superior health care services.

LHCs help to raise awareness among the community and distribute health messages targeting vulnerable populations such as women and children under the age of five. During the national vaccination campaigns carried out by the MoH, LHCs took a major role in supporting vaccination teams. LHCs helped teams to achieve access to homes and neighborhoods in their communities in need of vaccination and performed pre-campaign orientations, markedly increasing vaccination coverage.

NGOs Raise Awareness for Women's Health and Antenatal Care

Local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are vital in raising awareness and targeting specific health issues within their communities such as Women's Health and Antenatal Care (ANC). USAID/PHCPI has worked to identify and involve targeted NGOs, Civil Society Organizations, and influential leaders (e.g., religious leaders) to mobilize the community to take an active involvement in addressing local health needs.

PHCPI began compiling information and developing a database for active NGOs in all Iraqi provinces. At least two NGOs were selected from each province, in coordination with the Directorates of Health (DOHs) and PHCPI service coordinators, to be trained on Women's Health and ANC Awareness through six regional workshops. Participants attended from all provinces with the exception Anbar and Ninawa due to current security constraints. Ninety-nine participants were trained on Women's Health Awareness while 107 participants were trained on ANC Awareness. Both trainings utilized PHCPI-developed information, education and communication (IEC) materials.

NGO members, with support from the MoH's Health Promotion Unit and PHCPI service coordinators, conducted awareness meetings for community members in the catchment areas of PHCCs in all accessible provinces. Six hundred nine community members were reached through 24 Women's Health Awareness meetings held in the catchment areas

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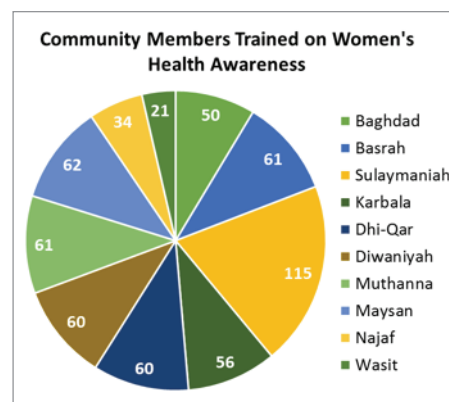
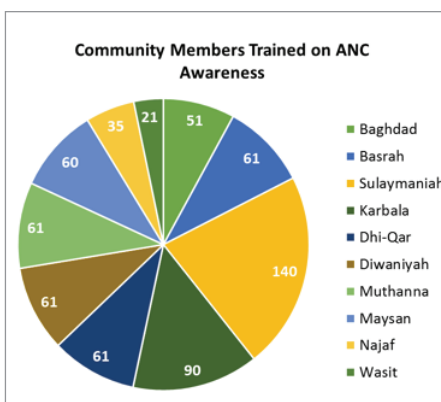
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Photo: USAID / PHCPI

PHCPI community-based activities have helped to reveal critical health care gaps, significantly improving the quality of services, and increase utilization of maternal and child health services by underserved and vulnerable populations bringing Iraq closer to the achievement of MDGs 4 & 5.

of 24 PHCCs while 641 community members were reached through 25 ANC Awareness meetings held in the catchment areas of 30 PHCCs. All awareness meetings were conducted using PHCPI's IEC materials and NGO members encouraged women to use the health services available to them at PHCCs.



Community Awareness Leads to Enhanced MCH

Increased awareness among the community from LHCs and NGOs will encourage Iraqis to seek available health services and help to instill trust in PHCCs. Additionally, focusing on the benefits of vaccination and clarifying the consequences of missed routine vaccinations will lead to greater vaccination coverage.

PHCPI awareness activities have led to:

- Increased knowledge among disadvantaged women about available health services, especially regarding reproductive health.
- Increased proportion of women who understand the importance of pre-conception health, birth spacing and antenatal care.
- Increased proportion of pregnant women who are aware of their options for receiving high quality safe delivery services.
- Increased proportion of women with at least four antenatal care visits.
- Increased early clinic-level detection of risky pregnancy resulting in increased utilization of emergency obstetrical care services by mothers.
- Increased proportion of women seeking postnatal care.

PHCPI community-based activities have helped to reveal critical health care gaps, significantly improving the quality of services, and increase utilization of maternal and child health services by underserved and vulnerable populations bringing Iraq closer to the achievement of MDGs 4 & 5.